Kentucky Literacy Link

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A Publication of the Kentucky Department of Education *Rebecca Woosley, editor*

Inside This Issue:

Your questions **and your contributions of ideas/lessons that work** are welcome. E-mail those to rebecca.woosley@education.ky.gov, and they may be included in this **literacy link** to connect teachers across the state by sharing insights, bright ideas and best

Items of Interest

Professional Learning Plan Resources Posted

The Kentucky Department of Education has designed professional learning resources to help schools work through the process of building and evaluating a high-impact professional learning plan. The *High-Impact Professional Learning Plan* includes internal feedback tools for schools to use throughout the professional learning (PL) process to monitor the effectiveness of the PL experience and make necessary adjustments.

The documents are posted at http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Instructional+Resources/Literacy/Kentucky+Literacy+Team.htm.

Appendices for Common Core Standards Posted

The appendices for the Kentucky-adopted Common Core Standards for English/Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects (Kentucky Core Academic Standards - KCAS) are intended to accompany the KCAS and provide supplementary readings and material to support the implementation of the standards.

Appendix A provides information about text complexity, research and supplementary material on reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language as well as a glossary of key terms.

Appendix B contains text exemplars illustrating the complexity, quality and range of reading appropriate for various grade levels with accompanying sample performance tasks.

Appendix C contains annotated samples demonstrating at least adequate performance in student writing at various levels.

All three appendices can be accessed at http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Instructional+Resources/Curriculum+Documents+and+Resources/Program+of+Studies/Common+Core+Appendices.htm.

KRA Annual Conference

The 2011 Kentucky Reading Association (KRA) Annual Conference will be held October 27-29 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Lexington.

The conference theme is *Lenses of Literacy,* and there is still time to submit a proposal.

Follow this link - http://www.kyreading.org/Conference.aspx - and then click on the *Call for Proposals* for submission details. The deadline for submitting a proposal is May 31.

Featured speakers for the conference include -

Chris Tovani – author of *I Read It, But I Don't Get It; Do I Really Have to Teach Reading?; Comprehending Content*

Stephanie Harvey – author of *Nonfiction Matters; Strategies That Work; Comprehension Toolkit ;Comprehension and Collaboration*

Donna Alvermann - co-author/co-editor of *Adolescents' Online Literacies in a Digital World; Reconceptualizing the Literacies of Adolescents' Lives; Adolescents' Online Literacies: Connecting Classrooms, Digital Media & Popular Culture; Bringing it to Class: Unpacking Pop Culture in Literacy Learning*

Peter Johnston – author of *Reading to Learn; Choice Words: How Our Language Affects Children's Learning; Critical Literacy/Critical Teaching: Tools for Preparing Responsive Teachers; RTI in Literacy – Responsive and Comprehensive*

Mark your calendar for this informative and inspiring conference!

College and Career Readiness (CCR) Standards - A Spotlight on Text Complexity

CCR Reading Anchor Standard 10:

Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

What does text complexity mean? How is text complexity determined? How important is it? Will it change what students are being asked to read at a specific grade level? These are a few questions teachers are asking as they consider implementing the new Common Core Reading Standard 10.

What does *text complexity* mean and how is it determined?

The Common Core Standards' Model of Text Complexity

When educators determine the complexity level of a text, there are three components to consider. The Common Core Standards Model graphic (above) illustrates the concept that all three text complexity components are of equal importance and all should be considered when making decisions about student reading.

Qualitative Factors: This component of text complexity measures the levels of meaning, the structure, language conventions, clarity and the knowledge demands for the reader.

- Levels of Meaning –
  When considering levels of meaning as a part of text complexity, in easy-to-read literary texts there is usually a single level of meaning, while more complex literary texts will likely have multiple levels of meaning, especially if they employ devices like satire.

- Structure –
  Elements of structure that signal a simple text include uncomplicated, predictable, conventional organization. Conversely, a more intricate, complex text will conform less to the predictable norms of the genre. Chronological organization is an example of conventional organization in a literary text, while more complex literary texts may change time or sequence of events with devices like flashbacks. Complexity in informational texts may be evident in structures and conventions that conform to a particular discipline, such as is seen in technical texts.

- Language and Clarity -
  Determining the complexity of texts with this measure is fairly easy. Less complex texts rely on clear, timely or conversational language, while texts that use figurative language, archaic language or academic language specific to a particular discipline are more complex.

- Knowledge Demands –
  Determining complexity based on knowledge demands is an equally important aspect of text selection. Texts that don't rely on a reader's knowledge level are typically less complex than texts that assume a reader's depth of content or discipline knowledge.

It is up to teachers to use these four qualitative factors to determine information about books selected or recommended for students. Teachers may base this information on personal familiarity with a text or the recommendation of other educators, including the school or district's media center specialists.

Quantitative Factors: This text complexity component measures the readability of a text. It includes word length, frequency of words, length of sentences and the cohesiveness of the text. These elements can be easily mechanically measured with a variety of tools.

The grade-level complexity of qualitative factors can be established with free readability measures like Lexile and Flesch-Kincaid (Microsoft Word) grade-level tests as well as with other programs. If schools or districts have purchased licenses to other programs that will provide a quantitative readability measure, media specialists and reading specialists should be able to assist teachers in locating and using those programs.

The chart below demonstrates the Lexile ranges for text complexity grade bands.

Text Complexity Grade Band in the Standards	Old Lexile Ranges	Lexile Ranges Aligned to CCR expectations
K-1	N/A	N/A
2-3	450-725	450-790
4-5	645-845	770-980
6-8	860-1010	955-1155
9-10	960-1115	1080-1305
11-CCR	1070-1220	1215-1355

It's important to note that there is not an exact correlation between a specific Lexile measure and a specific grade level. In any classroom or grade there will be a range of readers who need a range of reading materials. For example, in a specific grade classroom, there may be some readers who are ahead of the typical reader (about 250L above) and some readers may be behind the typical reader (about 250L below). To say that some books are "just right" for a particular grade level would incorrectly suggest that all students in that grade are reading at about the same level. The Lexile Framework for Reading is intended to match readers with texts at whatever level is appropriate for each individual reader.

Reader and Task Factors: This component includes consideration of readers' prior knowledge, their motivation, interests and the complexity that the task creates.

According to the RAND (Research and Development) Reading Study Group, it's vital to consider reader and tasks factors when making text determinations. This is especially important considering that prior knowledge and students' motivation are fundamental to their ability to read and understand complex text. The RAND report (2002) further establishes that motivation includes several criteria including a purpose for

reading, the student's interest in the subject matter, as well as how effectively the student reads.

The professional judgment of the teacher is a vital part of this text complexity component. The bottom line is that by using all three text complexity factors, teachers are best suited to make the determination about the appropriate text complexity level for their students.

Hess and Biggam (2004) compiled the following list of text complexity factors for teacher use. It incorporates all that is in the Common Core text complexity triangle:

- word difficulty and language structure
- text structure
- discourse style (e.g. satire, humor)
- genre and characteristic features of the text
- background knowledge and/or degree of familiarity with the content (including historical, geographical or literary references)
- level of reasoning required (e.g. difficulty of themes or ideas in the text, abstract concepts in the text)
- format and layout of the text
- length of the text

Hess and Biggam aptly point out that a text with short, simple sentences can still pose a challenge if the concepts are unfamiliar, the ideas are abstract or the text still requires interpretation based on inferential thinking. This is part of the reason why educators need to consider more that quantitative measures when deciding if a text complexity level is appropriate for a class or for an individual student.

In the final analysis, it is important for teachers to keep in mind that text complexity factors are guides to aide in the selection of texts students can read. In addition, those same factors should aide in the selection of texts that will also stretch students' to continue to grow and develop their skills as readers and as thinkers.

Are there examples to illustrate application of the triangle of text complexity factors?

The Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) has developed and shared some very helpful text complexity resources on its website. Included in those resources are examples of how a team of Kansas educators applied the three components of text complexity to Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

To determine the quantitative measure, the team used MetaMetrics' online Lexile tool, which yielded a Lexile level of 870L for Lee's novel. They also used a measure from Accelerated Reader that gave the book a 5.6 grade-level equivalent. In addition, Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) literacy consultants used Scholastic's *Teacher Book Wizard* as a tool that gave the novel a grade-level equivalent of 8.1. After applying the quantitative text complexity measures, the determination was that Lee's novel fell in the 6-8 grade-level text complexity band.

To determine qualitative measures, the KSDE developed different rubrics for literary texts and for informational texts that allow educators to evaluate the important elements of text that are often missed by computer programs, because they focus on factors that can be more easily measured electronically. (The web link for the KSDE resource will be included in the references at the end of this article.) A marked rubric serves as a guide for educators re-evaluating the initial placement of a work into a text complexity band. That reflection process may validate the text's placement, or it may reveal that the placement needs to be changed. For *To Kill a Mockingbird,* most of the criteria marked on their rubric fell in the *Middle High* range, which also placed it in the 6-8 grade text complexity band.

To aid educators as they look at reader and task considerations, which is the final text complexity component, KSDE also developed a helpful resource document meant to stimulate teacher reflection about the text, students, and any tasks associated with the text. In addition, the questions provided in the resource are intended to guide teachers thinking about the impact of using a specific text for the class. Using that tool for reader and task considerations, the Kansas team recommended that Lee's novel should more appropriately placed at the 9-10 text complexity band.

Appendix B in the Common Core English/Language Arts Standards confirms the Kansas team's final text complexity determination for the novel; *To Kill a Mockingbird* is placed within the grade 9-10 text complexity band of Appendix B. It is important to note that even though the team placed Lee's novel in a lower grade band based on quantitative and qualitative measures, when reader and task factors were considered, the grade band determined by the team. This is why it is important for teachers to consider all three complexity measures when

selecting or recommending a text for a class or for an individual student.

Kansas also created a template for teachers to use when engaging in the process of using the three measures to determine the appropriate text complexity of books for a student or a class. That resource can be found at the KSDE website.

How important is text complexity?

Whether students plan to enter the workplace, the military, a community college or a university after graduation, they will all need to be able to read and understand high-level texts, according to Malbert Smith, MetaMetrics president, who authored a March 3, 2011, Policy Brief. As a result, that ability to comprehend high level texts is a critical indicator of students' future success. This skill is not just the focus of high school teachers. The Common Core Standards detail the development of the ability to read and comprehend complex text independently and proficiently beginning in kindergarten and building progressively through grade 12.

Where's the evidence?

Research cited in the Common Core Standards indicates that in the last 50 years the texts students are reading by high school have become less complex despite the fact that the postsecondary reading demands have continued to rise.

Considering the reading demands high school graduates face in postsecondary situations, Lexile levels provided by MetaMetrics give teachers one way to determine the text complexity level appropriate for their students. The MetaMetrics Policy Brief: *Bridging the Readiness Gap* establishes contexts to clarify the level students need to reach by the time they graduate from high school. They report that the median lexile for military texts is 1105L, for workplace texts it is 1260L and for higher education texts it is 1393L. Right now, there is a gap from 65L to 230L between what seniors can read and the difficulty of postsecondary texts.

Why is the gap important? Research cited in the MetaMetrics Policy Brief indicates that a 250L difference can lower comprehension from 75 to 50 percent. The resulting gap for readers causes confusion and frustration. That frustration ultimately leads students to feel inept as readers.

The resulting adverse consequence is that the comprehension gap for these readers interferes with their success as post-graduates. In business and in the military, these individuals may require additional training just to be able to do the basic job that their prepared, proficient reader peers can already do. Students entering two-year community colleges or four-year universities with this reading gap may require costly remediation before they can begin to earn credits and progress toward a degree.

Sadly, the gap interferes with these individuals reaching their potential because they are competing with peers who began their post-graduate experience as proficient readers. The long-term impact of this gap could mean low-paying jobs, which could ultimately impact our state and our country's future.

So how can teachers guide students to more challenging text?

According to social psychologist Lev Vygotsky, teachers provide instructional scaffolding by "…supporting the learner's development and providing support structures to get to that next state or level" (Raymond, 2000). It's important for teachers to keep in mind that scaffolding should not be permanent. It is intended to give students the support they need to become independent learners. (Chang, Sung, & Chen, 2002) This strategy provides a way to guide readers to more complex texts.

Provide Scaffolding by -

- introducing background knowledge
- immersing students in more complex language exposure and usage that makes a difference in their ability to access knowledge
- engaging students with carefully selected or constructed graphic organizers that make the structure of the text visible (see graphic organizer resources in the *Suggested Reading* and *Check Out These Links* section of this newsletter)
- modeling how to interpret the meaning of texts that use more complex approaches, like satire or rhetorical argument
- engaging pairs or teams of students with more challenging texts as "buddies" and giving them opportunities to reflect on those texts through discussions with each other or through "buddy" journals
- making 20 percent of their class reading "stretch" texts that help them reach beyond their reading level

"Stretch" Text Example Strategies:

- Introduce students to relevant texts that pique their interest, yet move them beyond their normal text complexity level.

- Supplement class content with more demanding texts that explore challenging concepts or different perspectives that are relevant to the topic, issue or concept being addressed in the class.

- Offer supplementary reading in the classroom library or in classroom reading centers allowing student choice with "stretch" texts.

- Mary Schleppegrill, linguist and professor of education at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor (as cited in Gewertz, 2011) says teachers need to intensify instruction around text instead of simplifying it. One way to intensify instruction is to focus the reader on a guiding question or a purpose for reading that nudges readers to reach beyond their current grade band and challenges their thinking.

- Conference with readers and encourage students to set challenging reading goals that will involve **them** in the process of surpassing their "personal best" - just as athletes do.

- **Above all else**, congratulate and celebrate the stretch-successes of students. A personal note in students' reading journals, a quiet, "I'm proud of you; look what you can do" or a public pat on the back provides encouragement and motivates the next success.

Where can educators find the resources to help them apply the text complexity measures?

There are several text complexity resources available to Kentucky teachers. **Appendix A** provides detailed information about text complexity. **Appendix B** contains text exemplars illustrating the complexity, quality and range of reading appropriate for various grade levels with accompanying sample performance tasks. It's important to note that while the text exemplars in Appendix B are examples, the exemplar list is not intended to be all-inclusive.

Additional resources for measuring text complexity can be found in the *Check Out These Links* section of this newsletter.

To download copies of all the standards documents referenced in this article, go to this site:

http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards

References:

Chang, K., Chen, I. & Sung, Y. (2002). The effect of concept mapping to enhance text comprehension and summarization. *The Journal of Experimental Education 71* (1).

Gewertz, C. (2011). Teachers Tackle Text Complexity: Pilot N.Y.C. program in line with elements of standards. *Education Week*. 30, 24.

Hess, K. & Biggam, S. (2004). A Discussion of "Increasing Text Complexity". An article produced in partnership with the New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont Departments of Education. http://text.nycenet.edu/NR/rdonlyres/C8900488-3D92-4470-9A79-32CD81475D96/0/TextComplexity_KH05.pdf

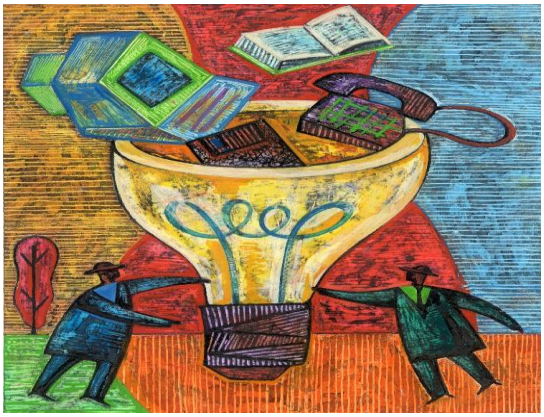
Kansas Department of Education. (2011). Text Complexity Resources. http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=4605

RAND Reading Study Group. (2002). *Reading for understanding: Toward an R & D program in reading comprehension.* Santa Monica, CA: RAND.

Raymond, E. (2000). Cognitive Characteristics. *Learners with Mild Disabilities.* Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, a Pearson Education Company.

Smith, M., (2011) Bridging the Readiness Gap: Demystifying Required Reading Levels for Postsecondary Pursuits. *MetaMetrics Policy Brief.*

Weber Tube PowerPoint. (2001). *The Common Core: Language Arts.* Addressing Concerns about the "Text Exemplar" List and "Measuring Text Complexity." http://www.webertube.com/document/7182/commoncore-text-exemplars-and-measuring-text-complexity



Critical literacy "…involves probing beneath the surface to uncover the assumptions, expose motives, and raise issues…."

Whitin, D. & Whitin, P. (2011). *Learning to Read the Numbers*. Urbana, Illinois: NCTE.

Turning the Page

Sharing a Literacy Strategy

Understanding text complexity and being able to use the three text complexity measures to determine what best meets students' needs while still challenging them to develop their skills are important tasks for teachers. However, in order for readers to be successful, appropriate text complexity choices need to be accompanied by content reading strategy instruction that helps them access content. This is especially important if students are going to understand how to approach text in different content areas.

The broad presentation of literacy strategies that follow offers the first step to addressing that piece of the literacy instructional puzzle for students.

Support Text Rigor with Content Literacy Strategies

Reading experts Timothy and Cynthia Shanahan (as cited in Gewertz, 2011) describe the kind of reading skills required by high-school students when readingin different subject areas:

- In English - students generally read a chapter or a similar part of an informational text before discussing and analyzing it.

- In mathematics – students need to do "close reading" (reading and re-reading a few lines of text) to comprehend the meaning.

- In history – to deepen their understanding and facilitate their critical thinking, connect historical events, determine the value of information from multiple sources and comprehend the perspective of authors, students need help developing the requisite skills.

- In science – students need the companion literacy skills of being able to interpret information from prose text and from the diagrams and formulas. **

Timothy Shanahan points out the need for content literacy instruction by describing what happens to high school students. He says high school students are expected to grapple with and comprehend difficult concepts and material in different subjects. Shanahan compares their moving from subject to subject all day, without the necessary literacy comprehension skills for survival,to leaving them on their own in foreign countries and assuming they will be able to cope. "That's what we do every day in schools," Shanahan says. "We move them from the land of math to science to history with no guides."

Underscoring the impact of teaching students content-specific reading strategies, Tim Shanahan emphasized four benefits for students:

- giving students **access** to content
- helping them **maste**r content knowledge
- building their understanding of **academic vocabulary**
- helping them develop the kind of thinking practiced in the discipline

****For more detailed information about content literacy strategies, Cynthia Shanahan designed and delivered some excellent content literacy Webex presentations that are posted on the KDE website:

http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Instructional+Resources/Curriculum+Documents+and+Resources/KDE+-+Webex+Information+and+Resources.htm

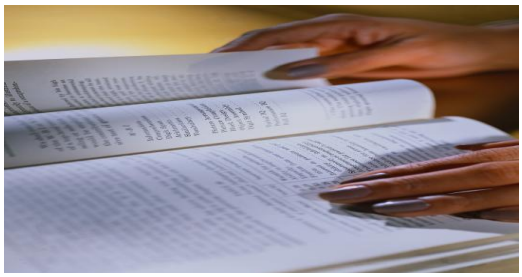
Look for these *Reading Transition Course* webinars:

Webinar 1 – *Teaching Reading in Content Areas* – 3/24/11
Webinar 2 - *Reading Literary Non-Fiction* – 4/07/11
Webinar 3 - *Reading Science* – 4/18/11
Webinar 4 – *Reading Humanities* – 4/21/11
Webinar 5 - *Reading History* – 4/28/11

Reference:

Gewertz, C. (2011). Teachers Tackle Text Complexity: Pilot N.Y.C. program in line with elements of standards. *Education Week*. 30, 24.

Suggested Reading



The resources listed in this section all contain support to guide teachers when making careful, intentional choices when using graphic organizers to support literacy instruction.

Allen, J. (2004). *Tools for Teaching Content Literacy*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

This resource will be a help to teachers when choosing appropriate graphic organizers as scaffolds for readers. It is designed as a tabbed, user-friendly flipchart. It includes details about each strategy and sample lessons that accompany the graphic organizers. Teachers have the added benefit of Allen's expertise through the class vignettes included in this book.

Lenski, S., Wham, M., Johns, J., & Caskey, M. (2007). *Reading and Writing Strategies: Middle Grades through High School,* Third Edition. Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co.

Based on research and the expertise of the authors, this resource is designed to help teachers quickly identify strategies and the graphic organizers that will provide scaffolding support for readers as they learn. The book also comes with a CD-ROM containing content area examples and reproducible.

Marzano, R., Pickering, D. & Pollock, J. (2001). *Classroom Instruction that Works.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

This research-based book not only includes strategies teachers can use to improve student achievement , but a part of the book also provides guidance for teaching on how to select or construct graphic organizers that will support student readers and learners.

Stephens, E. & Brown, J. (2000). *A Handbook of Content Literacy Strategies: 75 Practical Reading and Writing Ideas.* Norwood, Massachusetts: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, Inc.

In addition to a description of the strategies offered in this book, teachers will find graphic organizers that support readers and writers as they build comprehension in the process of reading and develop their thinking skills.

Check out these links…

A useful graphic organizer resource, plus so much more is available at http://essdack.org/?q=targetingtext. The Educational Services & Staff Development Association of Central Kansas (ESSDACK) has a website with a wealth of text structure resources that target elementary through high school. Select **"Text Structure Chart with Frames"** at the link for a tool to use with students that describes the text structure, signal words commonly used with that structure, an appropriate graphic organizer for that text structure plus additional resources to use when scaffolding literacy instruction for students.

Additional Resources for Lexile Measures:

- Overview Video

  http://www.lexile.com/about-lexile/lexile-video/

- "What Does the Lexile Measure Mean?" http://lexile.com/m/uploads/downloadablepdfs/WhatDoestheLexileMeasureMean.pdf
- "Lexile Measures and the Common Core State Standards"

  http://www.lexile.com/using-lexile/lexile-measures-and-the-ccssi/
- KDE Lexile Resource Page

  http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Instructional+Resources/Literacy/Lexile+for+Reading/Lexile+Information+for+Schools+and+Families.htm
- Kentucky Lexile Map http://www.education.ky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/828E6328-3A24-4B08-9231-F8719289D667/0/KYLexileMapParents_12162010.pdf

Thanks to our colleagues at the Kansas Department of Education and their teachers for sharing the text complexity resources they developed. Those resources can be accessed at

- KSDE Writing Homepage: http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=1726
- KSDE Reading Homepage: http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=142

****Watch for announcements about the posting of these resources currently being developed for Kentucky teachers:**

Text Complexity & the Kentucky Core Academic Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subject – a PowerPoint designed for use by teachers, schools and districts

Text Complexity Podcasts

Contact Us

Cindy Parker	Saundra Hamon
Rebecca Woosley	Pam Wininger
Renee Boss	Linda Holbrook
Carol Franks	Kim Willhoite
April Pieper	

Kathy Mansfield, Library/Media Specialist consultant

Kentucky Department of Education

Office of Next Generation Learners

500 Mero Street

Frankfort KY 40601

Phone: (502) 564-2106

E-mail: first.last name@education.ky.gov